

July 2012

Dear Parents

A number of you have contacted me to ask for some explanation of how the education reforms will affect this School and how this School will develop over the next few years. For this reason I am abandoning my usual format for my end-of-year letter.

The growth of the Sixth Form has been particularly pleasing. There are some twenty Upper Sixth this year who have followed some courses here and others at St Bede's. The Lower Sixth is much larger, at around 80, and they study all subjects here which means that they avoid having to travel between the two schools and we are able to monitor progress across all subjects more easily. The Lower Sixth in September 2012 will be slightly larger and will have the choice of twenty A levels and four BTEC National Courses. The entrance requirement for the Sixth Form is five passes at GCSE, but most subjects also have specific, more demanding, GCSE requirements, designed to ensure that pupils do not start on courses which they are unlikely to do well in.

As we no longer need to align our timetable to St Bede's, the shape of our Secondary School day will change in September. The advantage of this is that it gives five minutes travelling time between lessons and increases the amount of real teaching time.

#### Weekdays

8.30 - 8.35	Registration
8.35 - 8.50	Chapel /Assembly
8.55 - 9.45	Period 1
9.50 - 10.40	Period 2
10.40 - 11.00	Break
11.00 - 11.50	Period 3
11.55 - 12.45	Period 4
12.45 - 1.50	Lunch
1.50 - 2.40	Period 5
2.45 - 3.35	Period 6

#### Saturdays

8.30 - 8.35	Registration
8.35 - 9.20	Period 1
9.25 - 10.10	Period 2
10.10 - 10.25	Break
10.25 - 11.10	Period 3
11.15 - 12.00	Period 4

Our signs no longer make reference to Sports College, the Maths and Computing Specialism or being a designated School for Gifted and Talented pupils. This is because the Government has not actually abolished these titles BUT we no longer get any money for them and these specialisms are no longer specifically inspected. This does not mean that we are no longer interested in these areas, just that our funding is slightly less generous. Funding for education in general, and particularly for Sixth Forms, is falling, which means that we will need to work hard to ensure that we spend wisely and maintain the best possible standards of education.

In September Edinburgh House will have a new extension, which completes the programme to give all seven secondary houses an extra Common Room as well as a large ICT room. As Sixth Form boarding numbers grow we shall have to consider building another Annexe like those on Alexandra and Kent Houses.

The current Year 9 pupils who start their GCSE courses in September will be the first year group to take a new type of GCSE. Instead of taking unit or module exams in Year 10 and Year 11 they will study for five and a half terms and then take all their exams in the latter part of the Summer term. There will be no unit tests and, crucially, no opportunity to re-take exams. Coursework has already mainly been replaced by "controlled assessments" which are done in the classroom rather than in the pupils' own time.

The Government is still reviewing the structure of A levels but it is a fair bet that opportunities to retake exams will be reduced and coursework will be reduced or abolished. There is no date set yet for the Government to announce its decision.

Earlier this term we had Assessment Week for Years 7, 8 and 9 when they had a series of School exams. This reflects our wish to help pupils prepare for the demands of long written exams and next academic year we will also be having a drive on the quality of handwriting as pupils risk losing marks in exams if their handwriting deteriorates under pressure.

With my best wishes for the Summer holidays.

Paul D Spencer Ellis  
Headmaster